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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EUR/CACEN-JDEHART AND KWITMER

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SUBJECT: CONGRESSMAN HASTINGS URGES ARMENIA TO INVITE OSCE OBSERVERS TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

Sensitive but unclassified, please treat accordingly.

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) During a November 7-9 visit to Armenia, Rep. Alcee Hastings, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, made a strong case to top Armenian officials to reconsider their decision not to invite OSCE observers to monitor the constitutional referendum scheduled for November 27. In a series of meetings and in a press interview, Rep. Hastings explained that an OSCE monitoring mission will lend legitimacy to the referendum and stated that, even at this late date, the OSCE should be able to send a small monitoring team if it receives a formal invitation. All of the parliamentarians and civil society leaders who met with Hastings agreed that OSCE should be invited. FM Oskanian defended the original GOAM decision in legalistic terms, as Armenia's OSCE obligation to invite observers does not technically extend to referenda. He agreed, however, that the GOAM would reconsider the decision. Should efforts in Yerevan, Vienna and Washington prove successful, OSCE's ODIHR may need to be persuaded to send a team to Armenia at this late date. End Summary.

Rep. Hastings Presses for OSCE Observers

2. (SBU) Representative Alcee Hastings visited Armenia from November 7-9 as part of an extended visit to Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Together with other issues (covered septel) Rep Hastings urged the GOAM to invite the OSCE ODIHR to send an observer mission to monitor the November 27 constitutional referendum. Although the Congressman noted that it is late to send an invitation, the OSCE should still manage to send a small team of observers. Hastings acknowledged that although Armenia is technically not required to invite OSCE observers to referenda, as the organization most qualified to judge elections, Armenia should seek the legitimacy which a positive ODIHR assessment would add to the ballot. He also stressed that the observers would not simply criticize the referendum, but would be useful to the GOA by identifying the areas in which the voting system needs to be improved.

Parliamentarians Agree, but MFA has Decision Authority

3. (SBU) Hastings was successful in convincing Parliament Speaker Artur Baghdasarian and other leading MP's that Armenia should have invited ODIHR observers. Baghdasarian said he had sent the invitation to the Council of Europe to observe the vote, but it was the MFA which had responsibility for inviting OSCE. Baghdasarian agreed to speak to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the issue since the OSCE ODIHR is not Parliament's counterpart.

Oskanian Promises to Pursue the Issue

4. (SBU) Minister of Foreign Affairs Vartan Oskanian claimed that he does not think the GOA made an intentional decision not to invite OSCE observers to the constitutional referendum. Oskanian explained that the GOA did not receive a letter requesting that it invite OSCE observers, and that he has heard different information about whether the OSCE even sends observers to referenda. In the end, however, Oskanian agreed to reconsider the matter.

OSCE Office in Yerevan Hopes MFA Will Reconsider

5. (SBU) Vladimir Pryakhin, Head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, stated that he hopes Congressman Hastings's visit will persuade the GOAM to change its position. He disputed Oskanian's assertion that there was no specific decision not to invite OSCE as he was present during discussions when Armenia's Permrep in Vienna rejected the idea of OSCE observers.

16. Congressman Hastings has reviewed this telegram.

EVANS